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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Annual PA Wilds Awards Dinner, ‘Celebrating Community Character Stewardship,’ is April 27

Award Winners Announced

Take an opportunity to celebrate a milestone year for the Pennsylvania Wilds and honor individuals from the region who have gone above and beyond to grow nature and heritage tourism on April 27 at the Annual PA Wilds Dinner & Awards Banquet. The event kicks off with a networking cocktail reception complete with PA Wilds exhibitors at 3 p.m. at the DuBois Country Club, 10 Lakeside Ave., DuBois. Due to the demand for tickets, we have added a limited amount of additional seating and extended the registration deadline to Monday April 17.

“The Awards Selection Committee has been together for a few awards cycles now; just when we think we have a good handle on what to look for our minds are blown. It is awesome to see so many businesses, volunteers and youth taking part in this regional initiative,” remarked Holly Komonczki, chair of the committee and executive director of Lumber Heritage Region.

Winners of the 2017 PA Wilds Champion Awards include:

Business of the Year Award – La Belle Auberge Bed & Breakfast and Emerge Healing Arts & Spa of Wellsboro, PA (Tioga County). Owners and innkeepers Jesse and Laura Lee Robinson purchased La Belle Auberge in 2016, carrying on a 25-year family history of B&B innkeeping. They utilize the messaging of “the Pennsylvania Wilds” in marketing literature and the inn is a strong example of heritage preservation and community character stewardship.

Great Places Award – Cherry Springs State Park of Coudersport, PA (Potter County). Cherry Springs is one of the most unique destinations in the PA Wilds and it attracts thousands of tourists each year who come to the park to see one of the best star-filled skies in the country. It is designated by DCNR as a Dark Sky park and also had been given a Gold Level rating by the International Dark Sky Association. It is one of the few places left in the Eastern United States where over 6000 stars can be seen with the naked eye.

Conservation Stewardship Award (Group) – PA Trail Dogs (Clinton County). In addition to providing maintenance of remote hiking trails in the PA Wilds region over the last 10 years, PA Trail Dogs has introduced thousands of outdoor enthusiasts, including hikers and trail runners to the PA Wilds region by way of the numerous backcountry trail events that they organize annually, including the Eastern States 100, the Hyner Challenge, the Rothrock Challenge, and the Prowl the Sproul 10K.

Conservation Stewardship Award (Individual) – Amidea Daniel (Clinton County). Amidea has worked for the PA Fish and Boat Commission since 2008 as an outreach/education specialist and statewide coordinator for the award-winning Trout in the Classroom program, which exposes students to cold water conservation and involves raising brook trout from eggs to fingerlings in a classroom aquarium to release into local streams. Her skills and dedication to the program have been a large part of the program's success. To date the program has been offered in more than 284 classrooms.

Great Design Award – Matt Schauer of Williamsport, PA (Lycoming County). Schauer has gutted and renovated over half a dozen buildings in downtown Williamsport with an unmistakable style that promotes themes and principles from the PA Wilds *Design Guide for Community Character Stewardship* that have now become case studies for the 2nd edition. A self-taught, passionate developer, this Lycoming County native works closely with entrepreneurs moving into his spaces to make them a unique fit and calling out history and heritage at the same time.

Artisan of the Year Award – Perry Winkler of DuBois, PA (Clearfield County). Winkler has been instrumental in promoting the arts in this region for many years as an artist, a mentor and teacher, a gallery owner and the founder of a non-profit art education center. He is ceaseless in his efforts to raise community awareness of fine arts in our region and his personal work reflects his love of our area and the nature in the PA Wilds.

Inspiring Youth Award – Nate (Nathan) Wilson of Kane, PA (McKean County). Wilson, a seventh grader, is an inspiring PA Wilds youth entrepreneur, using natural resources to make a quality, local product with his business Nathan's Maple Syrup. Nate was 5 years old when he first watched maple syrup being made and after lots of experimentation and field research he and his father built their "Sugar Shack," officially launching Nate's Maple Syrup in 2011. He has partnered with various organizations and individuals to tap trees, sell product, educate, creatively promote and donate his maple syrup.

Outstanding Leader Award – Jenks Township Supervisors of Marienville, PA (Forest County). Forest County's Jenks Township has been a leader in recreation asset development and the board sees the

tremendous economic opportunities that can result from this investment. When they learned that a 73-mile rail trail might come right through Marienville, they started a movement to save the train station situated along the abandoned rail/future trail corridor. Their dream of transforming the former B&O Railroad station into a trailhead and visitor information center is starting to take shape and they received a mini-grant from the Lumber Heritage Region & PA Wilds Planning Team to develop a “trail hub” concept plan that could really bring this idea to life.

Event of the Year Award – Clarion’s Autumn Leaf Festival of Clarion, PA (Clarion County). This annual 9 day event attracts over 500,000 visitors to Clarion County to celebrate autumn in the PA Wilds. Featuring strong event advertising and branding, youth involvement, and increased attendance each year, the event is a staple of the PA Wilds and visitors leave with a better understanding of the region.

Best Brand Ambassador Award – Straub Brewery of St. Marys, PA (Elk County). Straub, an American Legacy Brewery, is the third oldest family-owned and operated brewery in the United States. Straub saw the value of the PA Wilds as a lifestyle brand. Nature tourism was helping revitalize the region and having a positive impact on the region’s communities - and Straub wanted to get more involved. It started to incorporate information about the Pennsylvania Wilds as a region and a brand into its sales and marketing strategy, sharing this background information with its extensive network of wholesalers and distributors across the region. The company intends to further promote the PA Wilds through the use of locally-inspired names for their beers.

“We just flat out don’t have enough awards for all the good work being done in the region,” Komonczi said. “It is very important that if your nomination didn’t win this year, you submit it again next year.”

The theme of this year’s awards dinner event is “Celebrating Community Character Stewardship,” tying in the PA Wilds Center’s unveiling of a new edition of the award-winning *PA Wilds Design Guide for Community Character Stewardship*. The guide, updated to include many great design examples from around the region over the last decade, was developed to help communities in the Pennsylvania Wilds be good stewards of their unique character as they experience economic development and growth.

The keynote speaker this year is Ed McMahon, currently a Senior Resident Fellow at the Urban Land Institute in Washington, D.C., where he holds the Charles Fraser Chair for Sustainable Development. McMahon is nationally known as an inspiring and thought-provoking speaker and leading authority on topics related to sustainable development, land conservation, smart growth, and historic preservation. His passion and expertise for community character inspire creativity and action.

The PA Wilds Center, a nonprofit whose mission is to integrate conservation and economic development in a way that strengthens and inspires communities in the Pennsylvania Wilds, just completed a strategic organizational integration with the Wilds many partners to set the regional work up for long-term sustainability. Focusing on one of the largest blocks of green between New York City and Chicago, an important objective of the PA Wilds Center is to brand the Pennsylvania Wilds region as a world class destination for outdoor recreation experiences by promoting its heritage, cultural, entrepreneurial and natural assets, in an effort to attract tourists, create jobs and help sustain rural communities. For more information on the PA Wilds Center's programs and services and to register for the dinner, please visit www.pawildscenter.org.

The Pennsylvania Wilds region includes the counties of Warren, Forest, Elk, Potter, McKean, Tioga, Clinton, Lycoming, Clearfield, Jefferson, Cameron, Clarion and Northern Centre.

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